

CHAPTER 1 – PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1 Introduction and Background

This **Proposed** Resource Management Plan (RMP) and **Final** Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) describes and analyzes alternatives for the future management of public lands and resources the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers in the Bighorn Basin in northwestern Wyoming (Figure 1-1). The Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project is a combined effort to revise RMPs for the BLM Cody Field Office (CYFO) and BLM Worland Field Office (WFO). This document refers to the combined CYFO and WFO planning areas as the Planning Area (Figure 1-1).

The BLM administers public lands in the Planning Area according to three plans – the Cody RMP (BLM 1990) for the CYFO and the Washakie RMP (BLM 1988a) and Grass Creek RMP (BLM 1998a) for the WFO. The existing plans have been updated and amended since the BLM adopted them. While the BLM is preparing one EIS to address the impacts of revising the three existing plans, each field office will issue a Record of Decision (ROD) and RMP for its jurisdictional area at the end of the planning process. When complete, the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project will replace existing RMPs with one Approved RMP and ROD for the CYFO and one Approved RMP and ROD for the WFO. The Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project is scheduled for completion by July 2015.

The Planning Area covers approximately 5.6 million acres of federal, state, and private lands in four Wyoming counties (Big Horn, Park, Washakie, and Hot Springs). Of the total area, 3.2 million acres are BLM-administered surface lands and 4.2 million acres are federal mineral estate. The CYFO extends west beyond the Bighorn Basin. However, generally, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service and the National Park Service manage those lands and leasing decisions are deferred to the surface management agency; therefore, this RMP and EIS does not consider them. The **BLM Memorandum of Understanding WO-300-2006-07 describes BLMs role in leasing decisions on National Forest Service lands (BLM 2006a).**

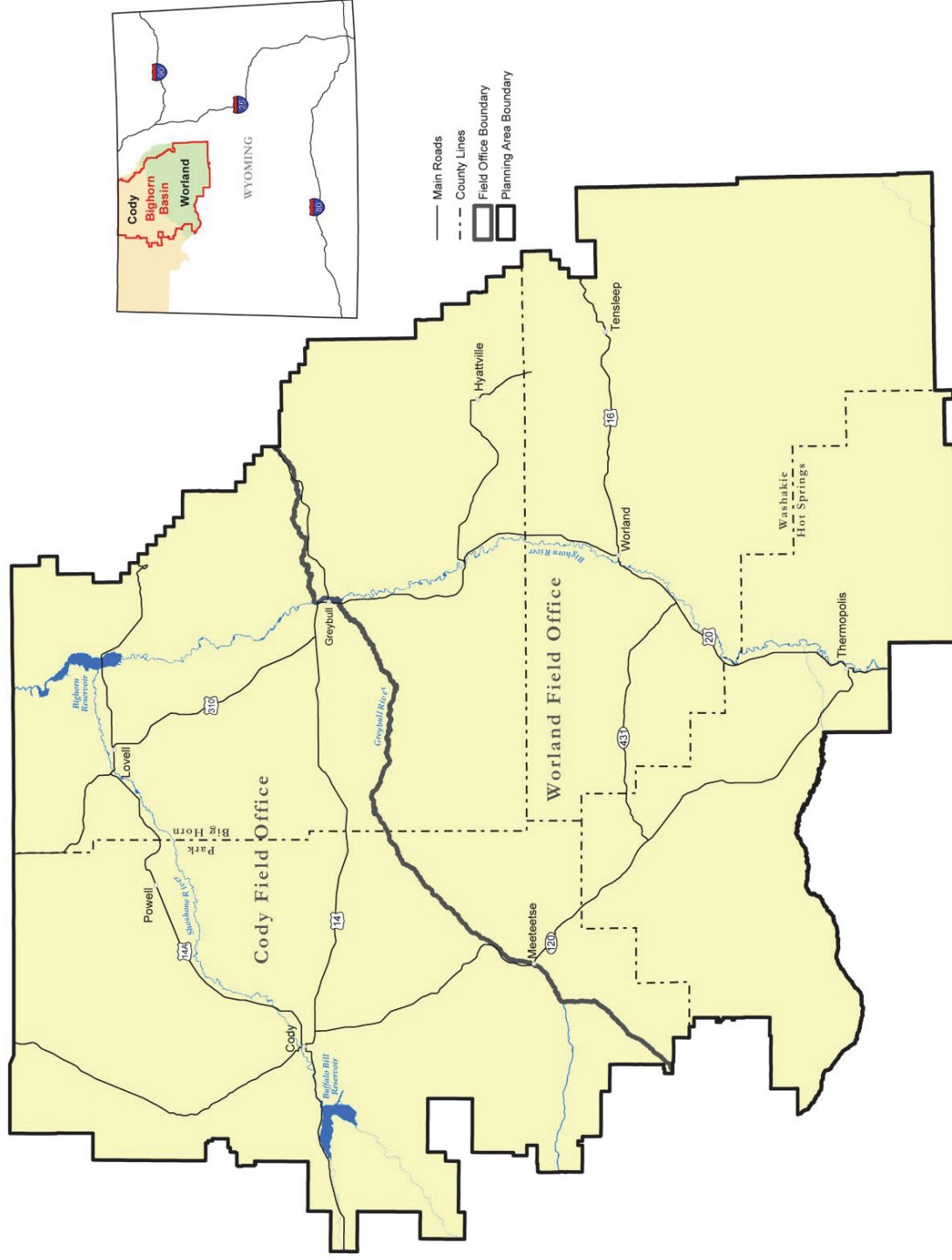
1.1.1 Historical Overview

The foundation for the BLM dates back to the Land Ordinance of 1785, which established the public domain and led to the creation of the General Land Office. In 1946, the United States (U.S.) Grazing Service merged with the General Land Office to form the BLM. Since the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the BLM has administered public lands according to the principles of multiple use and sustained yield, and to balance increasing and competing demands for resources on public lands.

1.1.1.1 Land Ownership in the Planning Area

As defined in the FLPMA, "... public lands means any land and interest in land owned by the United States within the several States and administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Land Management...." The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) BLM CYFO and WFO are responsible for managing most public lands in Wyoming's Big Horn, Park, Washakie, and Hot Springs Counties. County governments are responsible for land use planning for private lands in their jurisdictions.

Figure 1-1. Bighorn Basin Planning Area



BLM-administered surface lands in the Planning Area are mostly large blocks, with some scattered tracts intermingled with state and private lands (see Map 1). There are also areas in which different parties own surface rights and subsurface rights (such as rights to develop minerals) for a given piece of land, including federal minerals under privately owned surface, referred to as split-estate land.

These areas with scattered surface land patterns and varied mineral ownerships affect management options. Intermingled private lands also affect access to BLM-administered lands. Tables 1-1 and 1-2 summarize the surface and mineral ownership and administrative relationships in the Planning Area. The Approved RMP will not include planning and management decisions for private, State of Wyoming, or local government-owned lands or minerals (see Map 2).

Table 1-1. Surface Acreage in Each County of the Planning Area by Jurisdiction

Agency	Big Horn County	Hot Springs County	Park County	Washakie County	Totals
Bureau of Land Management	1,157,920	500,631	624,870	903,846	3,187,267
Bureau of Indian Affairs	0	76	0	0	76
Bureau of Reclamation	20,369	0	64,277	1,547	86,193
Department of Defense	3,543	0	0	0	3,543
U.S. Forest Service	86	40	15	18	159
National Park Service	15,645	0	0	0	15,645
State of Wyoming	74,944	85,754	157,193	100,768	418,659
Private	389,742	396,074	765,570	368,270	1,919,656
Water	2,548	1,974	6,721	1,400	12,643
Totals	1,664,796	984,429	1,618,644	1,375,849	5,644,868

Source: BLM 2013a

Table 1-2. Acreage of Subsurface Mineral Ownership in Each County of the Planning Area by Jurisdiction

Agency	Big Horn County	Hot Springs County	Park County	Washakie County	Totals
Bureau of Land Management	1,288,238	741,151	1,049,904	1,123,281	4,203,213
Other (state, federal, and private)	376,558	243,278	568,739	252,569	1,441,655
Totals	1,664,796	984,429	1,618,644	1,375,849	5,644,868

Source: BLM 2013a

1.2 Purpose and Need for the Resource Management Plan Revision

Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1502.13) require the purpose and need of an EIS to “briefly specify the underlying purpose and need to which the agency is responding in proposing the alternatives including the proposed action.” The purpose and need section of this EIS provides a context and framework for establishing and evaluating the reasonable range of alternatives described in Chapter 2.

1.2.1 Need to Revise Existing Plans

The BLM identified the need, or requirement, to revise the existing plans through formal evaluations, considering the Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) (BLM 2009a), examining issues identified during the public involvement process known as scoping, and collaborating with cooperating local, state, and federal agencies. Since the RODs for the existing plans were issued, new data have become available, and laws, regulations, and policies regarding management of these public lands have changed. In addition, decisions in existing plans do not satisfactorily address all new and emerging issues in the Planning Area. These changes and potential deficiencies created the need to revise the existing plans.

New Data

Monitoring, the availability of new information, and advances in science and technology provide new data to consider in the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project. The following documents and sources provide new data:

- Assessing the Potential for Renewable Energy on Public Lands (BLM and DOE 2003);
- Bighorn Basin Resource Management Plan Revision Project Summary of the Analysis of the Management Situation (BLM 2009a);
- BLM Wyoming Statewide Biological Assessments for Species Regulated by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (published between 2004 and 2005);
- Cultural Class I Regional Overview (BLM 2009b);
- Energy Policy and Conservation Act of 2000 Scientific Inventory of Onshore Federal Lands Oil and Gas Resources and Reserves and the Extent and Nature of Restrictions or Impediments to their Development (DOI 2006);
- Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Geothermal Leasing in the Western United States (BLM and USFS 2008a);
- Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement on Wind Energy Development on BLM-Administered Lands in the Western United States (BLM 2005a);
- Lands with Wilderness Characteristics Inventory – 2011 Update (BLM 2011a);
- National Assessment of Oil and Gas Fact Sheet – Assessment of Undiscovered Oil and Gas Resources of the Bighorn Basin Province, Wyoming and Montana, 2008 (U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] 2008b);
- Oil Shale and Tar Sands Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (BLM 2009c);
- Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario for Oil and Gas (BLM 2014a);

- Solid Mineral Occurrence and Development Potential Report for the Bighorn Basin Resource Management Plan Revision Project (BLM 2009d);
- Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on BLM lands in 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (BLM 2007b);
- Visual Resource Inventory for the Cody Field Office (BLM 2009e); and
- Wyoming Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan (Wyoming Sage-grouse Working Group 2003), Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Habitats (Connelly et al. 2004), and Sage-grouse Conservation Plan for the Big Horn Basin, Wyoming (BHBLWG 2007), A Report on National Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Measures (Sage-grouse NTT 2011), Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT) Final Report (USFWS 2013a), Sage-Grouse Baseline Environmental Report (Manier et al. 2013).

New and Revised Policies

Numerous policies have been either revised or developed since the RODs for the existing plans. Appendix B identifies relevant policies, including new and revised policies, and their effective dates.

The BLM released Handbook H-8320-1 (*Planning for Recreation and Visitor Services*) on August 22, 2014. The handbook assists BLM staff in the planning and management of recreation and visitor services on public land. The release of the handbook coincided with the final development of the Bighorn Basin Proposed RMP and FEIS. Accordingly, not all recreation and visitor services decisions in this Proposed RMP and FEIS follow the recommended format provided in the handbook. However, the Proposed RMP and FEIS complies with the requirements for establishing desired conditions, allowable uses and actions related to the management of recreation and visitor services as discussed in Handbook H-8320-1.

Emerging Issues and Changing Circumstances

Emerging issues and changes in local, regional, and national circumstances to consider when revising the existing plans include the following:

- Increasing and conflicting demands on Planning Area resources.
- Increasing complexity of resource management issues.
- Changes in the legal status of plants and wildlife occurring or potentially occurring in the Planning Area.
- Increasing conflicts between resource uses and protection of specific wildlife and wildlife habitat.
- Changes in greater sage-grouse habitat management.
- Maintaining public access to public lands.
- The spread of invasive plant and animal species on public lands.
- Changing demand for energy and minerals development.
- Changes in oil and gas leasing and the development of Master Leasing Plan analysis (Instruction Memorandum [IM] 2010-117).
- Management of riparian areas and water quality concerns.
- Fire and fuels management practices.
- Changes in livestock grazing practices and rangeland conditions.

- Changes in recreation and visitor use levels and locations.
- Management and protection of recently discovered cultural and paleontological resources.
- Addressing travel management, including increases in off-highway vehicle (OHV) use.
- The appropriateness of certain withdrawals, tenure adjustments, realty leases, and utility corridor rights-of-way (ROW).
- Increased interest in renewable energy development across the Nation.
- Updated inventories of lands with wilderness characteristics in the Planning Area.
- Identifying unique or sensitive areas that meet the criteria for special designation.
- Increasing air quality issues affecting human health and regulatory compliance.
- Cumulative increase in surface disturbance.
- Interest in the management of wild horses and herd levels.
- Increased interest in wind-energy proposals.
- Changes to visual resource classifications.
- Changes in resource- and resource-condition monitoring tasks and the entities performing the monitoring.
- The need to determine the suitability of the eligible waterway corridors within the Bighorn Basin for inclusion into the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

In March 2010 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published its listing decision for the greater sage-grouse as “Warranted but Precluded” (USFWS 2010). The listing decision identified the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms as a significant threat to greater sage-grouse now and for the foreseeable future. Further, the USFWS identified conservation measures in RMPs as the principal regulatory mechanism for the BLM. Based on the identified threats to the greater sage-grouse and the USFWS timeline for making a listing decision on this species, the BLM announced a National Greater Sage-grouse Planning Strategy Charter in August 2011 requiring the development of new or revised regulatory mechanisms, through RMPs, to conserve and restore the greater sage-grouse and habitat on BLM-administered lands on a range-wide basis over the long-term (Sage-grouse NTT 2011).

This Proposed RMP and Final EIS incorporates appropriate management actions and practices to conserve greater sage-grouse and its habitats on BLM-administered land.

National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy

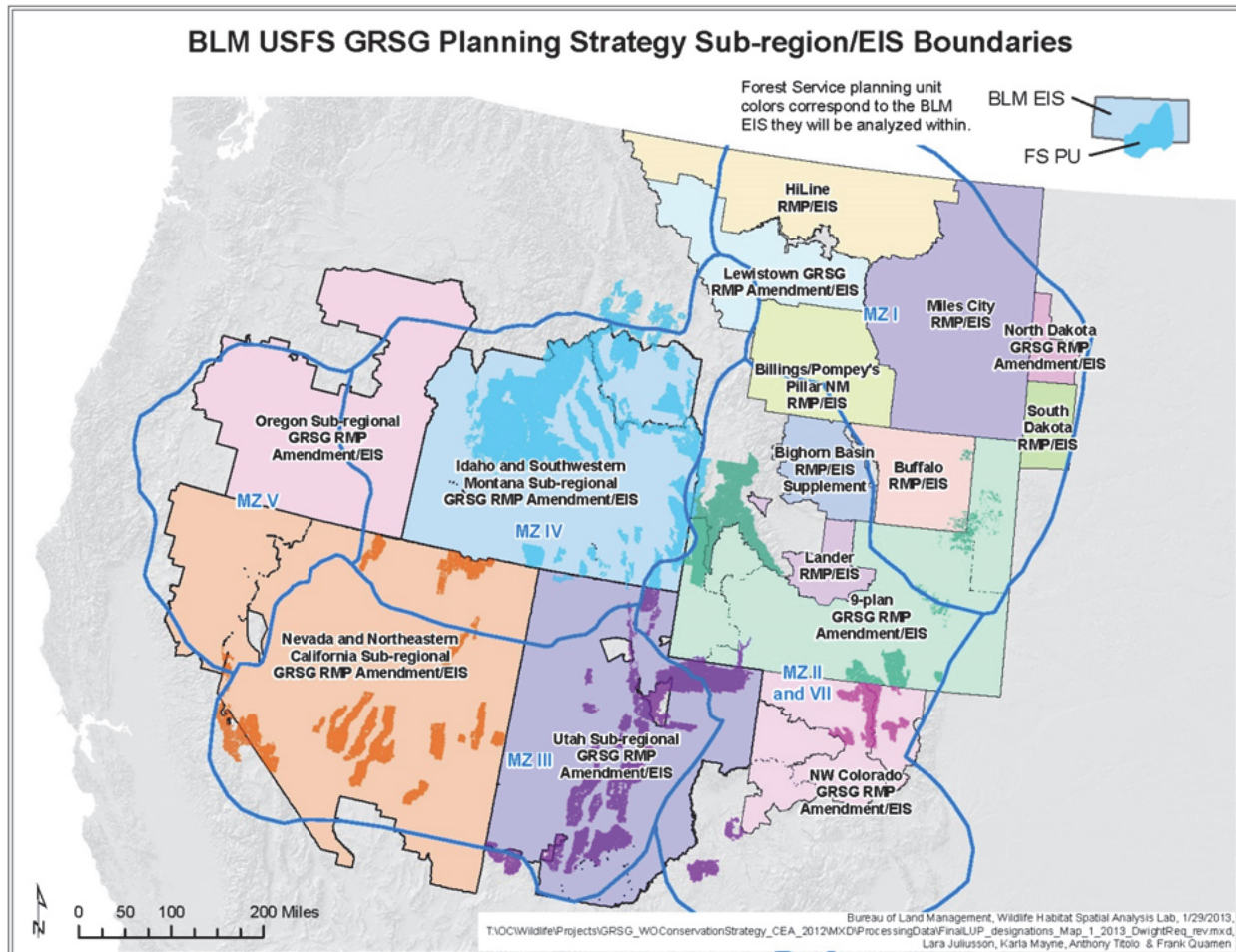
On December 9, 2011, the BLM published a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register* to initiate the BLM and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) greater sage-grouse Planning Strategy across 10 western states, including California, Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Utah, and Southwest Montana in the Great Basin Region and Northwest Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, South Dakota, and North Dakota in the Rocky Mountain Region (see Figure 1-2). This Proposed RMP and Final EIS is one of 15 separate EISs that are currently analyzing specific conservation measures, in order to incorporate them across the range of the greater sage-grouse, consistent with National BLM and USFS policy.

On December 27, 2011, the BLM Washington Office IM No. 2012-044, which directed all of the planning efforts across the greater sage-grouse range to consider all applicable conservation measures when revising or amending its RMPs in greater sage-grouse habitat, including the measures developed by the National Technical Team that were presented in their December 2011 document – A Report on National Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Measures. IM-2012-044 directs all planning efforts associated with

the national strategy to consider and analyze (as appropriate) the conservation measures presented in the report.

Along with the applicable measures that were outlined in the National Technical Team Report, planning efforts associated with this National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy will also analyze applicable conservation measures that were submitted to the BLM and USFS from various state governments and from citizens during the public scoping process.

Figure 1-2. BLM and USFS Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy



Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Objectives: Priority Areas for Conservation and How They Correlate with Priority and General Habitat Management Areas

In 2012, the Director of the USFWS asked the COT, consisting of state and USFWS representatives, to produce recommendations regarding the degree to which the threats need to be reduced or ameliorated to conserve greater sage-grouse so that it would no longer be in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future. The COT Report (USFWS 2013a) provides objectives based upon the best scientific and commercial data available at the time of its release. The BLM and USFS planning decisions analyzed in land use plans (LUPs)/EISs are intended to ameliorate threats identified in the COT Report and to reverse the trends in habitat condition. The COT Report can be viewed online at the following address:

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/birds/sagegrouse/COT/COT-Report-with-Dear-Interested-Reader-Letter.pdf>

The highest level objective in the COT Report is identified as meeting the objectives of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' (WAFWA) 2006 Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Strategy of "reversing negative population trends and achieving a neutral or positive population trend."

The COT Report provides a WAFWA Management Zone and Population Risk Assessment. The report identifies localized threats from sagebrush elimination, fire, conifer encroachment, weed and annual grass invasion, mining, free-roaming wild horses and burros, urbanization, and widespread threats from energy development, infrastructure, grazing, and recreation (USFWS 2013a).

Key areas across the landscape that are considered "necessary to maintain redundant, representative, and resilient populations" are identified within the COT Report. The USFWS in concert with the respective state wildlife management agencies identified these key areas as Priority Areas for Conservation (PACs).

Within the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project Planning Area, the PACs consist of a total 1,787,109 acres, regardless of ownership. Under the Proposed RMP, the PACs are comprised of 1,117,290 acres of Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMAs) managed by the BLM (Map 42 and Map 42a), 1,922,194 acres of General Habitat Management Areas managed by the BLM, and 148,330 acres of non-habitat managed by the BLM.

On November 21, 2014 the USGS published *Conservation Buffer Distance Estimates for Greater Sage-Grouse – A Review* (Manier et al. 2014). The USGS review provided a compilation and summary of published scientific studies that evaluate the influence of anthropogenic activities and infrastructure on greater sage-grouse populations. The BLM has reviewed this information and examined how lek buffer-distances were addressed through land use allocations and other management actions. The State of Wyoming's Core Area Strategy is designed to protect birds and habitat within core areas using a suite of tools and mechanisms that work in concert to conserve greater sage-grouse by reducing habitat loss and fragmentation through lek buffers, disturbance limits, excluded activities, and a sophisticated mapping utility to monitor the amount and density of disturbance. The USFWS has informed the BLM that the combined effect of these overlapping and reinforcing mechanisms give USFWS confidence that the lek buffer distances in the Core Area Strategy will be protective of breeding greater sage-grouse.

Habitat Delineation

The BLM has identified greater sage-grouse habitat in coordination with the State of Wyoming. This habitat falls into one of the following categories:

- Core Habitat Areas (Priority Habitat Management Areas) – The boundaries of the greater sage-grouse areas that were identified as having the highest conservation value to maintaining sustainable greater sage-grouse populations per version 3 of the State of Wyoming Executive Order (EO) Greater Sage-grouse Core Area of Protection (WY EO 2010-4) (Wyoming Office of the Governor 2010). These areas include breeding, late brood-rearing, and winter concentration areas, and correspond to Washington Office IM No. WO-2012-043 as Preliminary Priority Habitat.
- Key Habitat Areas – The boundaries of the greater sage-grouse areas that were identified as having the highest conservation value to maintaining sustainable greater sage-grouse populations per version 2 of the State of Wyoming EO Greater Sage-grouse Core Area of Protection (WY EO 2008-2) (Wyoming Office of the Governor 2008). These areas include breeding, late brood-rearing, and winter concentration areas, and correspond to Washington Office IM No. WO-2012-043 as Preliminary Priority Habitat. Key Habitat Areas were replaced by Core Habitat Areas, except under alternatives B and E which are based on version 2 of the State of Wyoming EO.
- Non-Core Sage Grouse Habitat – Areas of occupied seasonal or year-round habitat not located within Core Habitat. These areas correspond to Preliminary General Habitat as defined in Washington Office IM No. WO-2012-043.

The COT Report identified PACs based upon the data provided by State Fish and Game agencies. The State of Wyoming manages greater sage-grouse and greater sage-grouse habitats consistent with Governor's Executive Order 2011-05, *Greater Sage-Grouse Core Area Protection* (Core Area Strategy) (Wyoming Office of the Governor 2011), which establishes Core Areas.

In October 2014, the BLM updated the habitat category delineation. In the Proposed RMP and Final EIS greater sage-grouse habitat nomenclature has been changed from Core Areas to PHMA and Non-Core Sage Grouse Habitat to GHMA.

As noted above, alternatives B and E are based on Version 2 of the State of Wyoming EO Greater Sage-grouse Core Area of Protection (WY EO 2008-2) (Wyoming Office of the Governor 2008).

1.2.2 Purpose

An RMP is a land use plan that provides broad multiple-use direction for managing BLM-administered public lands. The FLPMA directs the BLM to develop such land use plans to provide for appropriate uses of public land. Decisions in land use plans guide future land management actions and subsequent site-specific implementation decisions. The RMP establishes goals and objectives (desired outcomes) for resource management and the measures necessary to achieve them. These measures are expressed as management actions and allowable uses (that is lands open or available for certain uses [including any applicable restrictions] and lands closed to certain uses).

The purpose of this RMP revision project is to ensure that public lands are managed according to the principles of multiple-use identified in FLPMA, while maintaining the valid existing rights and other obligations already established. The new RMPs will address changing needs of the Planning Area and create a management strategy that effectively responds to the planning issues within the framework of the planning criteria that best achieves a combination of the following:

- Employ a community-based planning approach to seek broadly supported solutions to issues, and collaborate with federal, state, and local cooperating agencies.
- Establish goals and objectives for managing resources and resource uses in the approximately 3.2 million surface acres and 4.2 million acres of federal mineral estate in the Planning Area administered by the BLM CYFO and WFO in accordance with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.
- Identify land use plan decisions to guide future land management actions and subsequent site-specific implementation decisions.
- Identify management actions and allowable uses anticipated to achieve the established goals and objectives and reach desired outcomes.
- To provide comprehensive management direction, make land use decisions for all appropriate resources and resource uses the BLM administers in the Planning Area or update existing decisions.
- Provide for compliance with applicable tribal, federal, and state laws, standards, and implementation plans, and BLM policies and regulations.
- Recognize the nation's need for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber, and incorporate requirements of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-58).
- Retain flexibility to adapt to new and emerging issues and opportunities and to provide for adjustments to decisions over time based on new information and monitoring.
- Strive to be compatible with the plans and policies of adjacent local, state, tribal, and federal agencies and consistent with federal laws, regulations, and BLM policies; and be flexible enough to adapt to future BLM policy and guidance updates.

1.3 Planning Process

The planning process is the result of the FLPMA requirement to manage lands under comprehensive plans and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirement to analyze alternatives in an EIS and evaluate and disclose impacts for all major federal actions with the potential to result in significant impacts. Revising an existing plan is a major BLM federal action with the potential to result in significant impacts. Therefore, this EIS analyzes six alternatives, including the NEPA-required No Action Alternative.

1.3.1 Bureau of Land Management Planning Process

Figure 1-3 illustrates the planning process BLM uses to develop and revise RMPs, as required by CFR Title 43, Part 1600 and planning program guidance in BLM Handbook H-1601-1, Land Use Planning Handbook (BLM 2005b). The planning process is designed to help the BLM identify the uses of BLM-administered lands the public desires and to consider these uses to the extent they would be consistent with Congressional laws and Executive Branch policies.

As shown in Figure 1-3, the planning process is issue driven. The BLM utilized the public scoping process (Identification of Issues) to identify planning issues to drive the revision of the existing plans (BLM 2005b). The BLM also used the scoping process to introduce the public to preliminary planning criteria (Development of Planning Criteria), which set limits to the scope of the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project.

As appropriate, the BLM collected data to address planning issues and to fill data gaps identified during public scoping (Inventory Data and Information Collection). Using these data, the planning issues, and the planning criteria, the BLM prepared a summary of the Analysis of the Management Situation to describe current management and identify management opportunities to address the planning issues. Current management reflects management under existing plans and management that would continue if the BLM selected the No Action Alternative.

Results of the first steps of the planning process clarified the purpose and need and identified key planning issues the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project needs to address. Key planning issues reflect the focus of the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project; the Planning Issues section of this chapter describes key planning issues in more detail.

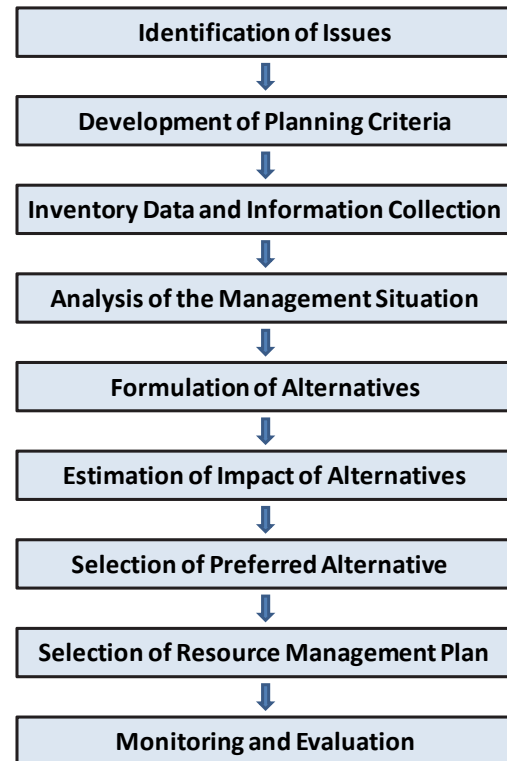
During alternatives formulation, the BLM collaborated with cooperating agencies to identify goals and objectives (desired outcomes) for resources and resource uses in the Planning Area (Formulation of Alternatives). Constrained by the planning criteria, these desired outcomes addressed the key planning issues and incorporated the management opportunities the BLM identified.

The BLM filled in the details of alternatives through the development of management actions and allowable uses anticipated to achieve the desired outcomes. The alternatives represent a reasonable range for managing resources and resource uses in the Planning Area. Chapter 2 of the Proposed RMP and Final EIS describes and summarizes the six alternatives (A, B, C, D, E, and F).

Chapter 4 (Environmental Consequences) includes an analysis of the impacts of each alternative. With input from cooperating agencies and BLM specialists, and considering planning issues, planning criteria, public input, and the impacts of alternatives A through F, the BLM selected Alternative D as the Agency Preferred Alternative (Selection of Preferred Alternative), and published the plan in the Draft RMP and Draft EIS.

A Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Bighorn Basin Draft RMP and Draft EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on April 22, 2011 (76 FR 22721, April 22, 2011). Public comments were solicited for consideration by the BLM review team. Following the closure of the comment period, the BLM published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to begin preparation of EISs and Supplemental EISs to Incorporate Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Measures into Land Use Plans and Land Management Plans

Figure 1-3. BLM Planning Process



Source: 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.4

(76 FR 77008, December 9, 2011) in accordance with the BLM National Greater Sage-grouse Planning Strategy Charter released in August 2011 (BLM 2011b). Nominations for greater sage-grouse-related Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) were submitted by members of the public in response to the NOI. The BLM reviewed these nominations and found importance and relevance criteria to be met, warranting consideration in the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project. Although these ACEC nominations were submitted in response to the December 2011 NOI, ACEC nominations can be submitted by any individual or organization inside or outside of the BLM at any time during the development of a land use plan.

In July 2012, the BLM Rocky Mountain Regional Interdisciplinary Team identified the need to prepare a Supplement to the Bighorn Basin Draft RMP and Draft EIS to consider incorporation of proposed management actions in greater sage-grouse priority habitats and to thoroughly consider the conservation measures identified in the Greater Sage-grouse National Technical Team (NTT) Report on National Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Measures (Sage-grouse NTT 2011), as referenced in BLM IM 2012-044. These issues were subsequently addressed through the analysis of two additional alternatives (E and F) in the Supplement to the Bighorn Basin Draft RMP and Draft EIS. Alternatives E and F each propose the designation of a greater sage-grouse-related ACEC that simultaneously responds to the needs to consider ACEC nominations submitted by the public and incorporate conservation measures identified in the NTT report. The analysis of alternatives E and F were integrated into this Proposed RMP and Final EIS following receipt and consideration of public comments on the Supplement.

Chapter 5 of this Final EIS describes the public involvement, consultation, and coordination efforts undertaken by the BLM throughout preparation of the Bighorn Basin RMP revision, including public meetings and comment periods on the Draft RMP and Draft EIS and Supplement. The BLM considered all substantive comments received and revised the plan based on certain issues raised in the comments, as presented in this Proposed RMP and Final EIS. The BLM prepared a Comment Analysis Report that summarizes all substantive comments received during the comment periods and the BLM's responses to those comments, including how the RMP and EIS was revised based on the comments. The Comment Analysis Report is presented in Appendix A.

Following review of the public comments on the Draft RMP and Draft EIS and comments on the Supplement to the Draft RMP and Draft EIS, the BLM identified the Proposed RMP. Alternative D is the Proposed RMP and is analyzed in Chapter 4 of this Final EIS.

The publication of the NOA in the *Federal Register* for this Proposed RMP and Final EIS initiated a 30-day protest period and 60-day Governor's consistency review period. The BLM will resolve protests and the Governor's recommended changes and prepare an Approved RMP and ROD for each field office.

Monitoring and evaluation will occur when the selected RMP is being implemented (Monitoring and Evaluation). After the BLM selects the RMP and each affected field office issues a ROD, the BLM will implement the decisions in the RMP and monitor and evaluate RMP decisions, how they have been implemented, and whether they accomplish the desired outcomes identified in the RMP. On a 5-year cycle, the BLM will report the results of monitoring and evaluation to the public. These cyclical evaluations will ensure accountability for implementing RMP decisions and will enable the BLM to propose amendments or revisions to RMP decisions that might be necessary or desirable. Appendix C provides an overview of the Bighorn Basin monitoring and evaluation protocol. The BLM Wyoming State Office (WYSO), in cooperation with the State of Wyoming and the USFWS, has developed a statewide Greater Sage-Grouse adaptive management strategy and monitoring framework (Appendix Y). Refer to Appendix Y for additional details of the Greater Sage-Grouse Monitoring Framework.

1.3.2 Resource Management Plan Implementation

After each field office issues a ROD and Approved RMP, the BLM will develop an Implementation Strategy, which will include an annual coordination meeting between the BLM and the agencies cooperating in the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project (Appendix D). The annual coordination meeting will include an update on implementation of the plan, foreseeable activities for the upcoming year, and opportunities for continued collaboration with the RMP cooperating agencies. The BLM could schedule additional coordination meetings as needed. The Implementation Strategy will tie RMP decisions to BLM budget requests, and provide a mechanism through which the BLM can track, fund, and accomplish management actions (Appendix D).

Planning and decision-making for BLM administration of public lands is a tiered, ongoing process. Documents produced during each successive tier are progressively more focused in scope and more detailed in terms of identifying specific measures to be undertaken and their potential impacts. The RMP, the first tier in the process, provides an overall vision of the goals and objectives and includes measurable steps, anticipated management actions, and allowable uses to achieve that vision. Upon RMP approval, the BLM develops activity- or project-level plans to implement RMP decisions. If the BLM develops an activity-level plan, it usually describes multiple projects for a single resource program (such as a habitat management plan) or multiple projects for multiple resource programs. If the BLM develops a project-specific plan, it usually describes a single project or several related projects.

In general, the BLM prepares a planning-level EIS at the RMP tier and prepares a more detailed EIS or Environmental Assessment at the implementation tier. Activity-level or project-level plans reflect management direction and the broad goals and objectives in the Approved RMP. In most cases, activity-level and project-level plans include additional public review and environmental compliance. This Proposed RMP and Final EIS involves only the RMP tier; therefore, it does not further consider activity-level and project-level plans.

The RMP provides basic program direction and establishes goals, objectives, and allowable uses. It focuses on the resource conditions, uses, and visitor experiences the BLM should achieve and maintain over time. The RMP provides a framework for implementation-level decisions for as long as its decisions remain effective, and must take a long-term view that considers the protracted periods associated with natural processes, which can be years, decades, or longer.

1.4 Decision Framework

Identifying planning issues and developing planning criteria are the first steps in narrowing the scope of the RMP revision. Planning issues and planning criteria provide the framework within which the BLM makes RMP decisions (actions determined and established in the Approved RMP). For example, the BLM received nominations (issues) for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) during the scoping process for the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project. These issues fall within one of the planning criteria (see Section 1.4.2), the need to identify and analyze areas potentially suitable for ACEC designation. The Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project will decide whether the BLM will designate any ACECs in the Planning Area. In this example, the land use planning decision is referred to as a special designation.

BLM RMPs provide guidance for land use planning decisions according to the following categories: physical, biological, and heritage resources; resource uses; and special designations. In the context of these categories, the planning team develops management strategies designed to provide viable options for addressing planning issues. Management strategies provide the building blocks upon which the BLM

develops general management scenarios and, eventually, the more detailed resource management alternatives. Resource management alternatives reflect a reasonable range of management options that fall within planning criteria, law, and BLM policy limits. The following sections describe the planning issues and planning criteria the BLM used to revise the existing plans.

1.4.1 Planning Issues

The BLM conducted a public scoping process to determine the scope of issues to be addressed in this RMP and EIS. Scoping is a public involvement process to identify issues to address during the planning process. As part of this public involvement process, the BLM solicited comments and issues (including during six public scoping meetings [see Chapter 5]) from the public, organizations, tribal governments, and federal, state, and local agencies, as well as from BLM specialists. The BLM received 3,367 comment documents, including 291 unique documents and 3,076 form letters. The BLM *Land Use Planning Handbook* (BLM 2005b) defines planning issues as “...disputes or controversies about existing and potential land and resource allocations, levels of resource use, production, and related management practices.” Issues identified during scoping for this RMP and EIS comprise two categories:

- Issues within the scope of the EIS and used to develop alternatives or otherwise addressed in the EIS.
- Issues outside the scope of the EIS or that could require policy, regulatory, or administrative actions.

The BLM used issues determined to be within the scope of the EIS to develop one or more of the alternatives or addressed those issues in other parts of the EIS. For example, as it refined planning issues, the BLM collaborated with cooperating agencies to develop a reasonable range of alternatives designed to address or resolve key planning issues, such as which areas should be open to energy and mineral resource development. A reasonable range of alternatives provides various management approaches for the BLM and cooperating agencies to address this and other key planning issues, including management of resources and resource uses in the Planning Area. In other words, key planning issues serve as the rationale for alternatives development. The comment documents provided 1,060 substantive comments that were categorized into the key planning issues the BLM used to develop the alternatives analyzed in this RMP and EIS follow.

Key Planning Issues

<i>Climate Change</i>	How can the BLM incorporate climate change adaptation and/or responses into its land management practices?
<i>Watershed and Air Quality Management</i>	How can the BLM manage the use of public lands while protecting watershed and air quality?
<i>Energy and Minerals Management</i>	Which areas should be open to mineral and energy development, and how should the BLM manage such development while protecting human health and natural and cultural resources?
<i>Fire and Fuels Management</i>	How can the BLM manage fire and fuels to protect public safety and natural and cultural resources?

<i>Invasive and/or Noxious Species</i>	How can the BLM manage the spread of and mitigate impacts associated with invasive species and/or noxious weeds?
<i>Fish, Wildlife, and Special Status Species</i>	How can the BLM manage public land use while maintaining and improving terrestrial and aquatic habitats?
<i>Wild Horses</i>	How can the BLM manage wild horses on public lands while also protecting natural and cultural resources?
<i>Cultural and Paleontological Resources</i>	How can the BLM manage paleontological, cultural, and traditional resources to provide both resource protection and opportunities for public education and study?
<i>Visual Resources</i>	How can the BLM manage public lands for visual qualities?
<i>Lands and Realty</i>	What land tenure and management adjustments are needed to meet access and development needs while also protecting natural and cultural resources?
<i>Comprehensive Travel and Transportation Management, and OHVs</i>	How can the BLM manage travel on public lands?
<i>Lands with Wilderness Characteristics</i>	Should the BLM manage to protect lands with wilderness characteristics? If so, where and how?
<i>Recreation and Visitor Use</i>	How can the BLM provide recreational opportunities on public lands while protecting public safety, and natural and cultural resources?
<i>Livestock Grazing</i>	How can the BLM manage livestock use on public lands while also protecting natural and cultural resources?
<i>Special Designation Management</i>	How can the BLM manage areas that contain unique or sensitive resources?
<i>Socioeconomic Resources</i>	How can the BLM manage public land use with the preservation of local tradition and local economies that rely upon BLM-administered land?

In addition to key planning issues, the BLM identified other issues, themes, and positions during the scoping process. The BLM did not use issues determined to be outside the scope of the EIS or that could require policy, regulatory, or administrative actions to address, to develop alternatives and did not carry such issues forward in this EIS.

The list below summarizes suggestions from the public that the BLM considered but did not carry forward for detailed study in the EIS because they were outside the scope of the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project, already required by law or policy, or would require the BLM to exceed its authority.

- Analyze impacts from specific actions or activities that will occur or be addressed during subsequent RMP implementation decisions. See Appendix D for the basic elements of implementing the RMP.

- Adopt or otherwise ensure the revised RMPs are compatible with specific regulations, policies, mandates, guidance, or plans, or integrate one or more of these items into the planning process.
- Change the BLM's planning or public involvement processes.
- Address issues that are outside of the agency's jurisdiction or manage resources outside of the Planning Area.
- Conduct site-specific analyses, inventories, or surveys.
- Vague comments in which the issue or concern was not clear.

For a description of the issues identified during scoping, see the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project Scoping Report (BLM 2009f). The scoping report describes the public involvement process and the issues the public identified. The report, which is incorporated here by reference, is available on the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project website at the following address:
<http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/programs/Planning/rmps/bighorn/docs.html>.

1.4.2 Planning Criteria

Planning criteria are the standards, rules, and guidelines that help guide the RMP planning process. These criteria influence all aspects of the planning process, including inventory and data collection, developing issues to address, formulating alternatives, estimating impacts, and selecting the Agency Preferred Alternative and the Proposed RMP. In conjunction with planning issues, planning criteria ensure that the planning process is focused and incorporates appropriate analyses. The BLM develops planning criteria from appropriate laws, regulations, and policies. The criteria also help guide final RMP selection, and the BLM uses the criteria as a basis for evaluating the responsiveness of planning options.

The planning criteria for the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project are as follows:

1. The revised RMPs will recognize valid existing rights.
2. Decisions in the revised RMPs will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. Decisions will comply, as appropriate, with policy and guidance.
3. Impacts from the management alternatives considered in the revised RMPs will be analyzed in an EIS developed in accordance with regulations at 43 CFR 1610 and 40 CFR 1500.
4. The planning process will follow the stages of an EIS-level planning process – conduct scoping, develop an AMS report, formulate alternatives, analyze the alternatives' potential effects, select an agency preferred alternative, publish a Draft RMP and EIS, provide a 90-day public comment period for the draft, prepare and publish a Proposed Plan and Final EIS, provide a 30-day public protest period, and prepare an ROD. For specific information, see the *Land Use Planning Handbook*, H-1601-1.
5. Lands covered in the revised RMPs will be public land and split-estates the BLM administers. The BLM will make no decisions about lands or minerals that are not BLM administered.
6. BLM decisions will not apply to private land with private mineral estate.
7. The impact analysis will include all lands that could affect or be affected by BLM management of public lands in the Planning Area.
8. For program-specific guidance regarding land use planning-level decisions, the process will follow *Land Use Planning Manual* 1601 and *Handbook H-1601-1*, Appendix C.

9. The Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project planning effort will be collaborative and multi-jurisdictional. The BLM will strive to ensure that its management decisions complement its planning jurisdictions and adjoining properties within the boundaries prescribed by law and regulation.
10. Broad-based public participation will be an integral part of the RMP revision and EIS process.
11. Decisions in the RMP will strive to be compatible with existing plans and policies of adjacent local, state, federal, and tribal agencies as long as the decisions are consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands.
12. The planning team will work cooperatively and collaboratively with cooperating agencies and all other interested groups, agencies, and individuals.
13. The BLM and cooperating agencies will jointly develop alternatives for resolution of resource management issues and management concerns.
14. The planning process will use the Wyoming BLM Mitigation Guidelines to develop management options and alternatives and analyze their impacts, and as part of the planning criteria for developing the options and alternatives and for determining mitigation requirements.
15. Planning and management direction will focus on the relative values of resources, not on the combination of uses that would give the greatest economic return or economic output.
16. All proposed management actions will be based on current scientific information, research and technology, and existing inventory and monitoring information.
17. Standards for Healthy Rangelands and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for the Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the State of Wyoming will apply to all activities and uses.
18. The BLM will provide for public safety and welfare related to fire, hazardous materials, and abandoned mine lands.
19. The BLM will analyze and modify visual resource management (VRM) class designations to reflect present conditions and future needs.
20. The BLM will consider current and potential future uses of public lands through the development of reasonably foreseeable future development and activity scenarios based on technical analysis of historical, existing, and projected levels of use.
21. The BLM will develop reasonable foreseeable action scenarios for all land and resource uses (including minerals) and portray them based on historical, existing, and projected levels for all programs. The BLM will consider existing endangered species recovery plans, including plans for reintroduction of endangered and other species.
22. The planning process will involve Native American tribal governments and will provide strategies for the protection of recognized traditional uses.
23. Planning decisions will comply with the ESA and BLM interagency agreements with the USFWS.
24. The BLM will continue implementing The National Sage-grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy that requires impacts to sagebrush habitat and sagebrush-dependent wildlife species be analyzed and considered in BLM land use planning efforts for public lands with sagebrush habitat in the Planning Area.
25. The BLM applied the relevance and importance criteria for ACEC designation (BLM1988b) to BLM-administered public lands in the Planning Area to identify areas that have the potential for ACEC designation. An ACEC designation alone does not change the allowed uses of public lands involved (FLPMA Section 201(a) and 43 CFR 1601.0-5a). In addition, protective measures for

ACECs are not applied or required simply because of the designation. Any protective measures applied to ACECs are based on what is necessary to protect the relevance and importance criteria for which the ACEC was designated. The only automatic requirement associated with an ACEC designation is that a plan of operations must be submitted for any mining claim development in the area (43 CFR 3809.11(c)(3)).

26. During the preparation of the AMS for the Planning Area, the BLM evaluated free-flowing streams using the criteria established by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 to determine their eligibility and suitability for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (NWSRS). The BLM developed interim management prescriptions for stream segments passing through public lands deemed Wild and Scenic River eligible. To provide a clear basis for comparisons, the No Action Alternative will not consider or include any of the stream segments evaluated in association with preparing the AMS for the RMP revisions.
27. Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use management decisions in the revised RMPs will be consistent with the BLM 2001 National OHV Strategy, BLM Manual 1626 (BLM 2011c), BLM Handbook H-8342-1, 43 CFR 8340, and IM 2008-014. OHV area designations will be “limited” unless otherwise classified as “open” or “closed” to meet land use plan objectives.
28. The BLM will continue to manage Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) under BLM Manual 6330 – Management of Wilderness Study Areas (BLM 2012a) until Congress either designates all or portions of the WSA as wilderness or releases the lands from further wilderness consideration. It is no longer BLM policy to designate additional WSAs through the RMP process, or to manage any lands other than existing WSAs in accordance with the non-impairment standard prescribed in BLM Manual 6330.
29. Forest management strategies will be consistent with the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.
30. Fire management strategies will be consistent with the *Guidance for Implementation of the Federal Wildland Fire Policy* (USFS et al. 2009).
31. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and metadata information will meet Federal Geographic Data Committee standards, as required by Executive Order 12906 Coordinating Geographic Data Access, as amended. The BLM will comply with all other applicable BLM data standards.
32. In accordance with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield, this RMP will provide for monitoring and evaluation of RMP decisions over time. To the extent that Adaptive (<http://www.doi.gov/initiatives/AdaptiveManagement/index.html>) Management, as defined by DOI or BLM guidance, applies, the BLM will apply and assess Adaptive Management in activity-level and project-level plans. This RMP is not a standalone Adaptive Management project.
33. The BLM will utilize the COT Report (USFWS 2013a), the WAFWA Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Habitats (Connelly et al. 2004), and any other appropriate resources, to identify greater sage-grouse habitat requirements and best management practices.
34. While energy development has been identified as the primary threat to the greater sage-grouse within its eastern range, this area is not immune to the threat of wildfire. Within the Rocky Mountain Region wildfire was identified by the COT Final Report (USFWS 2013a) as a present and widespread threat in 7 of 13 PACs and as a present but localized threat in the remaining PACs. While fire is a naturally occurring disturbance in the sagebrush steppe and the incursion of nonnative annual grasses is facilitating an increase in mean fire frequency which can preclude the opportunity for sagebrush to become re-established. As such, the RMP and EIS includes requirements that landscape scale Fire and Invasives Assessments be completed and updated regularly to more accurately define specific areas to be treated to address threats to sagebrush steppe habitat. Within the Rocky Mountain Region, assessments have not yet been completed

but will be scheduled based on the need to identify and address potential threats. Additionally, the Secretary of the Interior issued Secretarial Order 3336 on January 5, 2015 which establishes the protection, conservation and restoration of “the health of the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem and, in particular, greater sage-grouse habitat, while maintaining safe and efficient operations as a critical fire management priority for the Department”. The Secretarial Order will result in a final report of activities to be implemented prior to the 2016 western fire season. This will include prioritization and allocation of fire resources and the integration of emerging science, enhancing existing tools to implement the RMP and improve BLM’s ability to protect sagebrush-steppe from damaging wildfires.

1.4.3 Major Statutes, Limitations, and Guidelines

Numerous federal and state laws and applicable regulations, policies, and actions affect the alternatives analyzed in this Proposed RMP and Final EIS. The FLPMA is the primary authority for BLM administration of public lands. This law provides the overarching policy by which the BLM administers public lands. The law establishes provisions for land use planning, land acquisition, administration, range management, ROW, designated management areas, and the repeal of certain laws and statutes. The FLPMA also requires that the BLM provide food and habitat for fish, wildlife, and domestic species. FLPMA Sections 201 and 202 establish BLM land use planning requirements. BLM Handbook H-1601-1, *Land Use Planning Handbook* (BLM 2005b), provides guidance for implementing BLM land use planning requirements established in FLPMA Sections 201 and 202 and the land use planning regulations pursuant to 43 CFR 1600.

NEPA stipulates the process through which public officials make decisions that consider the environmental consequences of their actions and work to protect, restore, and enhance the human environment. NEPA provides for public input regarding issue identification and consideration of the environmental impacts of major federal actions that affect the quality of the human environment. Revising an existing RMP is a major federal action for the BLM. NEPA requires federal agencies to prepare an EIS for major federal actions; therefore, this Final EIS accompanies the revisions of the existing plans.

NEPA also created the CEQ, which issued regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508) to ensure proper consideration of environmental concerns in federal decision-making. The DOI and the BLM have published their own regulations (43 CFR Part 46) and guidance related to implementation of the NEPA process and CEQ regulations (DOI Manual Part 516 and Handbook H-1790-1).

Many additional laws, regulations, and policies guide the management of public lands and are therefore relevant to the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project. Appendix B provides a list of these laws, regulations, and policies.

1.4.4 Other Related Plans

BLM planning policies require that the BLM review approved or adopted resource plans of other federal, state, local, and tribal governments and, when practicable, be consistent with those plans, to the extent their decisions are consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands. If the other agencies, tribes, and/or governments do not have officially approved or adopted resource-related plans, then the land use plan must, to the maximum extent practicable, be consistent with their officially approved and adopted resource-related policies and programs. Table 1-3 lists plans related to the management of land and resources that apply to this RMP.

Table 1-3. Related Plans

Plan Type	Plan Name
County Land Use Plans	Big Horn County Land Use Plan (Big Horn County 2009)
	Hot Springs County Land Use Plan (Hot Springs County 2002)
	Park County Land Use Plan (Park County 1998)
	Washakie County Comprehensive Plan (Washakie County 2012)
Conservation District Plans	Cody Conservation District Long Range Plan (Cody Conservation District 2007)
	Hot Springs Conservation District Long Range Plan (Hot Springs Conservation District 2006)
	Meeteetse Conservation District Land Use Management and Resource Conservation Plan (Meeteetse Conservation District 2011)
	Powell-Clarks Fork Conservation District Long Range Plan (Powell-Clarks Fork Conservation District 2006)
	Shoshone Conservation District Long Range Plan (Shoshone Conservation District 2005)
	South Big Horn Conservation District Natural Resource and Land Use Long Range Plan (South Big Horn Conservation District 2012)
	Washakie County Conservation District Natural Resource Land Use Plan (Washakie County Conservation District 2010)
Other Plans	Big Horn County Mountain Community Wildfire Protection Plan (Big Horn County 2005)
	Big Horn River Watershed Management Plan (Washakie County Conservation District 2006)
	Bighorn National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (USFS 2005a)
	Bitter Creek Watershed Plan (Powell-Clarks Fork Conservation District 2004)
	National Fire Plan (USDA and DOI 2000)
	Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan for the Big Horn Basin, Wyoming (BHBLWG 2007)
	Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Shoshone National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USFS 1986)
	Shoshone River Watershed Draft Plan (Shoshone River Watershed Plan Steering Committee 2008)
	South Big Horn County, Wyoming Watershed Plan (South Big Horn Conservation District 2006)
	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 8 Wyoming State Implementation Plans (EPA 1989; EPA 1993; EPA 1999; EPA 2007)
	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Mountain Prairie Region Strategic Plan – Wyoming (USFWS 2009)
	Wyoming Department of Agriculture Strategic Plan (WDA 2008)
	Wyoming Game and Fish Commission Final Wyoming Gray Wolf Management Plan (Wyoming Game and Fish Commission 2011)
	Wyoming Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan (Wyoming Sage-grouse Working Group 2003)
	Wyoming Greater Sage-Grouse Core Area Protection Strategy (Wyoming Office of the Governor 2011 and 2013)
	Wyoming State Wildlife Action Plan (WGFD 2010a)
	Wyoming Strategic Habitat Plan (WGFD 2009a)
	Wyoming’s Comprehensive Statewide Historic Preservation Plan, 2007-2015 (Wyoming SHPO 2007)
	Wind/Bighorn River Basin Plan Final Report (Wyoming Water Development Commission 2010)
	Wyoming Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2009-2013 (Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources 2009)
	Wyoming Statewide Trails Plan 2004 (Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources – Trails Program 2004)
	Yellowstone National Park Fire Management Plan (NPS 2004)

The BLM is aware that there are specific state laws and local plans relevant to aspects of public land management that are discrete from, and independent of, federal law. However, BLM is bound by federal law. As a consequence, there may be inconsistencies that cannot be reconciled. The FLPMA and its implementing regulations require that BLM's land use plans be consistent with officially-approved state and local plans only if those plans are consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands. Where officially-approved state and local plans or policies and programs conflict with the purposes, policies, and programs of federal law applicable to public lands, there will be an inconsistency that cannot be resolved. With respect to officially-approved state and local policies and programs (as opposed to plans), this consistency provision only applies to the maximum extent practical. While county and federal planning processes, under FLPMA, are required to as integrated and consistent as practical, the federal agency planning process is not bound by or subject to state or county plans, planning processes, policies, or planning stipulations.

1.5 Topics Not Addressed in this Analysis

Laws, regulations, policies, and Executive Orders require the examination of specific resource topics during the NEPA process. In some cases, initial evaluation identifies topics not relevant to the Planning Area or that do not require further analysis.

The initial evaluation for the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project identified prime and unique farmlands as a topic that does not need further analysis. In accordance with the Farmland Protection Policy Act, the BLM determined that no prime or unique farmlands or farmland of statewide or local importance occur on public lands in the Planning Area. Furthermore, none of the actions proposed would disturb farmlands. Therefore, the Bighorn Basin RMP Revision Project planning process does not analyze impacts to prime and unique farmlands.

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